

## Flutterby, Butterfly by foreverinthe\_eighties

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**Summary:**

El had chosen to return to her friends. It could be said that they were the people who loved her the most, but there was someone else, deep in the back of her mind that she only thought about when she was completely alone.

What would happen if, years after the events that took place in 1984, Kali seeks Eleven out herself. And gives her the opportunity to change her mind.

# 1. 001

## Author's Note:

This is my first Stranger Things fanfiction, I hope you like it.

## Chapter 001

July 1987

The school bell rang, signalling the end of classes and the school day in Hawkins High. Within moments, the hallways were flooded with students pushing and shoving each other in their haste to get as far away from school as they could. The sounds of teenagers high on that Friday feeling cascaded throughout the school and every teacher let out a sigh of relief, thankful for the break the weekend gave them.

Mike Wheeler managed to make it to his locker before things got too full on in the corridors, and opened it to pull out his books he would need for the weekend. The inside of his locker was pretty plain. While some students decorated theirs with colourful items and graffiti, Mike's consisted only of three things stuck to the inside of the door.

The first one was a cut-out newspaper clipping from when he and the three other boys had won the science fair trophy in their first year of high school. Each one of them had a huge grin plastered on their faces as they gathered together around the shinning cup, triumphant in their success.

The second was a sketch. It consisted of the whole party and had been given to him by Will the previous month. Will had gotten incredibly good at art over the recent years, and his talent shone best when drawing what he loved. That particular sketch had been drawn when the whole party had been having a lazy Sunday by the quarry. Will had started drawing then taken a photo so he could fill it in, later handing it to Mike with the shy smile he always had when

giving people his work.

The third and last thing that decorated his locker was a photo that had been taken last summer of Mike and El. Everyone had been invited over to the Byers house for an evening barbecue and Jonathan had been taking photos as he always did. The two of them had been sitting on the grass and blissfully unaware of the others surrounding them, until Jonathan had snapped them sitting there, which had caused El to laugh when Mike had almost jumped out of his skin. Jonathan had given him a copy of the photo a week later and Mike had insisted that he hated it for another two weeks after that. Eventually however, he'd given up and decided he didn't care if the boys found it cheesy, and had stuck it in his locker.

Mike glanced at it briefly and despite himself felt the corner of his mouth pull upwards ever so slightly at the sight of it. *God he was such a sap.*

"I don't give a damn what you think you know Dustin, you can't argue that Empire is the best one!"

Mike sighed and slammed his locker door shut as the distinct sound of Lucas floated towards him over the bustle of the corridor.

"But Return of the Jedi is insane!" Dustin shot back. "The conclusion is better than the journey."

"You only like the conclusion because of the fluffy teddy bears at the end," Max could now be heard adding to the conversation.

"They're *Ewoks*, not teddy bears!" Dustin practically shouted at her as they came into Mike's view. "And trust you to side with Sinclair here."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Max's red hair whipped round as Dustin looked for a way out, his eyes landing on Mike.

"Mike!" He shouted, even though Mike was close enough that he could hear their conversation anyway.

He nodded and pushed himself away from his locker, slinging his bag over his shoulders. "Don't tell me you're arguing about Star Wars

again,” he groaned. He had been kept awake on too many sleepovers now by listening to Dustin and Lucas argue their points.

“It’s not my fault Dustin’s a stubborn asshole,” Lucas shot Dustin’s way, but before the other boy could retort Max had stepped in between them.

“Okay, enough,” she snapped. “I’m sick to death of the pair of you squabbling like an old married couple!”

Mike couldn’t say he was disappointed that she had intervened. He didn’t like getting in the middle of his friends’ silly arguments, and neither did Will. So until they had met Max, the other boys had just dealt with it as part of the party dynamic. El only really got involved with arguments when it involved Mike or Hopper’s name was mentioned so she wasn’t much help with the other two.

“Finally!” Will said, appearing out of nowhere next to Mike and making him jump slightly. Will had a habit of creeping up on people. He couldn’t help it, he just had a tendency to walk quietly - almost silently - wherever he went, so his presence was usually suddenly announced and with all the shit they had gone through in the past couple of years, was it surprising that Mike was a little jumpy with a few things?

The smaller boy grinned and gestured at Max. “Thank you for getting those two to shut up.”

“Pleasures all mine,” Max shot Dustin and Lucas a look warning them to keep quiet and rolled her chewing gum around in her mouth in a way that made Mike’s nose wrinkle in disgust. Max didn’t pay him any attention either way, instead leaning against the lockers and hoisting her skateboard in her grip. “Where’s El?”

Mike glanced around, suddenly aware of the lack of his girlfriend’s presence. “I dunno,” he said quietly, trying not to let it affect him. “She probably just got held up somewhere.”

Max snorted and Mike turned to face her, eyebrows coming together in a frown. “You’re right,” Max said quickly, glancing at Lucas. “She’s probably just held up.” She sighed, “can we please go wait in the car,

I'm sick of this stupid corridor already!"

The others murmured their agreement, albeit Mike with some reluctance. He was about to turn to follow them when Will's voice cut through the remaining noises of the hallway and stopped them all. "What's that?"

Mike glanced back at his friend to see that Will was indicating something on the floor by Dustin's feet, at the foot of Mike's locker. It was a small folded piece of paper that Mike recognised from one of El's notebooks. It had a butterfly in the corner. He bent forward to reach it but Dustin got there quicker. He snatched it off the floor, grinning.

"Dustin, it probably just fell out of my locker, give it here," Mike held out his hand for the scrap of paper but Dustin just grinned mischievously, eyes glinting.

"What's this, Mike?" He unfolded it slowly and Mike knew Dustin was loving this. "A secret note? Could it be a love let - oh." His eyes had dropped to the writing and halfway through his sentence he'd trailed off, his grin had dropped and he frowned.

"What's wrong?" Mike snatched the paper out of Dustin's loose grip and scanned the words hurriedly.

*Mike,*

*I have to leave. Don't wait for me, and don't follow me home.*

*Love, El x*

Mike felt his whole body go slack at the note. Her neat cursive handwriting that spelled out the words *I'm leaving*. And his mind had immediately started going through the possible connotations of those words. Leaving what? School? Hawkins? ...Him?

"What?" Lucas and Max were both instantly by his side, impatiently trying to get the information as to what had caused Dustin to stop smiling and Mike to turn sheet white. Only Will remained quiet, as if he already knew the contents of the note.

“What does that mean?” Lucas’s voice cut through Mike’s swirling thoughts. He looked at his friend who was looking from the note he had snatched out of Mike’s hand, to Mike, then to the rest of the party. “What does it mean she's leaving?”

“She probably just meant ditching school,” Max reasoned. Everyone looked at her. “I mean come on,” Max tried explaining herself. “She's never been great at phrasing things properly, has she?”

“Why would she ditch school?” Dustin squinted his eyes at Max. “She loves school.”

He had a point. Ever since she had started school last year, during their second year of high school, El had been ecstatic about doing normal things, like a normal teenager. It was to be expected, but it didn't mean someone like Dustin completely understood her total willingness to go to classes every day.

Mike pulled himself together with a sharp breath that made everyone look at him, silently. “Well,” he said calmly. “There's only one way to find out.” He started walking down the now empty corridor.

“Wait, you can't mean...?” Lucas called after him. “She said not to follow her home!”

Mike swivelled on his heel to face them again and frowned. “Something is wrong Lucas,” he snapped, pointing at the note still in Lucas's hand. “El doesn't leave cryptic messages, it's not normal.”

“El isn't exactly who you'd call normal either, Mike,” Lucas pointed out.

Mike opened his mouth to retort but stopped when Max strode towards him, skateboard under her arm and car keys already twirling around her finger. “Let's go.”

Mike nodded, glad of her support in this. Despite a rocky start to both his friendship with Max, and El’s friendship with Max, both of the girls had become fast friends in recent years and Mike was happy to let that happen. He found he was a lot happier about many things once El had come back from her year in hiding.

"Well, don't just stand around," Max snapped. "Mike's right, there's something weird about this. We need to find out what's going on." She left her unspoken words hanging in the air but they all heard them. *Before it's too late.*

-:-

As Max was the oldest in their party, it had been her who first learned to drive. Well, drive legally. Her real dad had given her enough money to get a nice car and since then she had been the designated driver of their party. She took her role as zoomer very seriously and even though both Mike and Lucas could now drive as well, for the most part they chose not to, allowing Max to drive them whenever they went anywhere as a group. Dustin had chosen not to learn yet as he got lifts from Steve anywhere that Max wouldn't take him, and Will, being the youngest of the group was still learning. El had managed to convince a very reluctant Hopper to agree to lessons but she had grown bored of them quite quickly, preferring to ride with Mike or Max instead. She knew Mike would drop pretty much anything to spend time with her and he knew he would too.

Dustin beat Lucas to shotgun and before Lucas could protest, Max had shut him up quickly by announcing that if she had to hear them bicker all the way to Hopper's, they could both walk.

"I don't think this is a very good idea," Will spoke up quietly from where he was sitting in between a worried Mike and a sour Lucas.

"Zip it Byers," Max turned the ignition and revved the engine, twisting in her seat so she could see out the back to reverse. "You live with El, we're just coming back with you."

"I just want to see if she's okay," Mike muttered to Will quietly. He suspected that Will knew more than he was letting on. After all, due to Hopper's and Joyce's 'unofficial relationship', Will was practically El's brother at this point. Mike looked at Will, pleading with his eyes. "Please Will?"

Will opened his mouth to answer, his face resigned, but Max stomped on the accelerator and the vehicle shot forwards, sending up clouds of dust behind it as everyone in the car was pressed back against

their seats at the speed Max was driving at.

"Someday," Dustin said, "you are going to get your license revoked for breaking the speed limit and killing someone."

"Have a little faith Dusty," Max grinned and pointed to herself with one hand. "Zoomer, remember?"

"I don't think I can forget," Dustin muttered before letting out a yelp of fear as Max rounded a corner, barely slowing down in the process.

Although he would never say it to her - for fear of having some painful experience inflicted on him - Mike sometimes thought that Max's driving reminded him of Billy's. He could never forget that time her crazy stepbrother had nearly run them all down and the speed he had been going at.

"Could you maybe slow down a little bit?" Will asked from the back. He looked a little pale and Mike thought that it wasn't just from the speed of the car. His suspicions that Will definitely knew something he didn't increased and he furrowed his forehead.

"No!" Max yelled over the music that was now blasting out of the speakers. "We need to get to Hoppers as quick as possible!"

A journey that would normally take them twenty minutes if they were riding their bikes and ten if Max had been driving at a sensible speed, took them five.

It hadn't taken Hopper very long to realise that living in the cabin with El wasn't going to work. It had done for the first year she had lived with him, when it was necessary for her to stay hidden, it had been perfect. But once her friends had discovered her whereabouts, Hopper realised he had to get a proper place for them to stay. Their house wasn't big like the Wheeler family's, but it wasn't as small as the Byers. El had been over the moon when they'd first moved in, and was overjoyed when Joyce and Will had started staying over more often with them. Jonathan was away at college for most of the time, and eventually they had gotten to the point the previous year when Joyce and Will had moved in with the chief and Eleven.



Max's tires screeched as she braked hard and sudden on the curb just outside the house and the boys were all slammed forward against their seat belts. Mike could see the Chief's cruiser parked in the driveway and Joyce's car right next to it. There was nothing out of the ordinary to be seen at first glance, until they all scrambled out of Max's car - Lucas climbing over Dustin in his haste to get out of the back seats.

Hopper was leaning against his truck, glaring at them and smoking a cigarette. Mike blinked. That wouldn't have been suspicious at all except for the fact that El had made Hopper give up smoking two years ago because she didn't like the smell.

He took off up the path, ignoring the protests of his friends to wait and running towards the door of the house. He would've gotten there as well, if it weren't for Hopper's big hand that reached out and grabbed him by the back of the jacket.

"Hey! Hey!" He growled. "What do you think you're doing?"

Mike glared at him. He was almost on the same eye-level as the police chief now, but he was on the skinny side and Hopper was... well, Hopper was like a bear; strong and gruff.

"I'm going to see El, let me go!" Mike snapped angrily. It infuriated him how this man seemed to take it upon himself to keep him away from Eleven. Deep down he knew he was still slightly sore about his concealment of El three years ago. He might have forgiven Hopper, but he would always remember the pain he went through.

Hopper didn't let go of his jacket, he just furrowed his brow and glanced at the house. "I can't let you go in there kid," he said, his voice softening.

Mike felt panic rising in his chest. "Is she okay? What's wrong? Why can't I see her?"

"If I let you go do you promise not to run in?"

Mike hesitated. Hopper knew the weight of the word '*promise*' and now he was using it against him. But what he if went in the house

and something awful had happened. “Fine!” He snapped, pulling his jacket out of Hopper’s grip just as his friends crowded up behind him.

“What’s going on?” Max actually looked quite scary in that moment, her red hair flying and a dark and the same look on her face as the night she had slammed Steve’s bat between Billy’s legs.

“Is El okay?” Dustin stared Hopper straight in the eye.

The chief sighed, and Mike saw with increasing worry that he looked unsure about something, and the chief never looked unsure. Unless something really bad was happening.

“Is it the bad men?” Mike spluttered before his brain could tell his mouth to keep shut. “Have they come to take her away again?”

Lucas slammed his fist into the palm of his hand. “If they have we’ll be ready for them!”

Hopper was now pinching the bridge of his nose between two fingers. “No! It’s not the *bad men*!”

Mike didn’t appreciate his sarcastic tone when he repeated their name for the Department of Energy people. “Well then what is it?” He glared at Hopper, frustration bubbling over into his voice.

Before Hopper could answer, the front door of the house opened and everyone spun to see Joyce exiting in a hurry. “Jim, I -” she turned to face them all on the doorstep and stopped. “What are they all doing here?”

Mike couldn’t miss the slightly panicked tone of her voice that she was obviously trying to cover behind surprise.

Something smashed inside the house and Joyce and Hopper both jumped, but Mike was already making a break for the door. *Screw Hopper.*

He dodged Joyce who tried in vain to reach for him, and burst through the front door and into the hallway. Hearing raised voices in the direction of the kitchen he took a shortcut through the living room and slamming through the door he skidded to a halt at the sight

in front of him.

The first thing he saw was El, standing next to the counter, her eyes wide with shock at his unceremonious entrance. She was leaning on the surface as if for support and there was a tiny trickle of blood just beginning to run down from her nose. The second thing he noticed was the remains of the large vase that his mom had given Joyce for Christmas last year, lying scattered on the floor, the dried flowers that had been decorating it splayed out in a heap and the water pooling on the kitchen tiles.

The last thing Mike noticed was that there was someone else in the kitchen. Someone he didn't know, but someone he recognised. She was short with dark hair swept to the side, part of which was dyed purple. Half her head was shaved and he wore dirty clothes that didn't seemed to have been washed in a while. He recognised her eyes though, from the few photographs in the paper clippings he had gone through with El when she was telling him about her sister.... Her sister. Her eyes were dark and watching him curiously.

Only one thought managed to go through Mike's brain in that moment, and it wasn't a good thought.

*Shit.*

## 2. 002

### Summary for the Chapter:

El had never meant to lie to Mike...

### Notes for the Chapter:

Here it is, hope you enjoy!

#### Chapter 002

El had never meant to lie to Mike. She considered lying the biggest offence against her friends, but she had to do it. It wasn't really lying either, not exactly. She just... didn't tell him the whole truth. She did regret leaving him that note. El knew as she biked home early from school that she probably should've just told him she was sick and had been sent home. That's what Max would've said to her, but Max wasn't here, and that *would've* been lying.

But at least he wouldn't be worried that there was something really wrong. El didn't know what to think, but it was done now, and there was no turning back and undoing it.

It had happened the previous night. She had just hung up the phone after getting yelled at by Hop from down stairs that she had been on it for over an hour and it was getting late. She always spoke to Mike on the phone every night, and their conversations usually ended up taking way longer than she originally thought. They had switched from SuperComs to phones because of that exact reason. Also that the other could be listening in on their conversations and they wanted privacy from their friends sometimes. It had all been normal until she closed her eyes and lay back on her bed. Without even trying she had found herself in what Dustin called her 'superhero mind void' but what she just thought of as the *inbetween*.

That was when she saw her. When she had returned from her trip to Chicago three years ago, Hopper had reluctantly given up all the files that had been given by Doctor Owens on Kali and her history. Mike had helped her go through them all, listening to her own account of her sister as they had done so. Since then however, she hadn't

mentioned Kali to anyone. El knew that most people thought she had given up ever seeing her again, or even thinking about her, but that wasn't true. El never talked about her, but Kali often appeared at night, in her dreams.

Tonight was different. This wasn't a dream, it was something else. El saw Kali in her mind, and knew this was real. She also knew she was close, very close. Her sister was facing away from her and looking intently at something El couldn't see.

*Sister.* She spoke the word but also said it in her mind as well as through her mouth and the reaction was instant.

Kali turned like she had heard her. "Jane?" She breathed, looking right at her. El knew that Kali was powerful. Powerful enough to see her and hear her. They were the same in that sense.

*Find me.* Again, the words were spoken through both mind and mouth and this time, and El couldn't seem to be able to stop herself from saying them.

Kali's eyes widened, "Jane." She spoke softly. "I'm coming to see you. Tomorrow. I already know where you are. Please, give me a chance to make things better." She blinked and zeal noticed how shiny her eyes suddenly were, "I miss you... sister."

El couldn't help herself. She reached out and brushed her hand against Kali's. The dark haired girl flipped her hand around and grasped hold of El's, staring straight at her. El stared back in surprise. The only things she'd ever been able to touch in the inbetween had been her mother, and the Demogorgon.

"I'll find you." Kali's words echoed in her mind as the vision broke and her image started to swirl and disappear like smoke on the wind.

"El! El wake up!"

El opened her eyes with a start and sat bolt upright, staring around the room at the darkness of the night filling it. Her eyes eventually landed on the pale face of Will who was right next to her, a worried expression on his face.

“Will?”

Will visibly relaxed at the knowledge that she recognised him. “Yeah,” he said gently. “You were dreaming, it's okay now. I get them all the time,” he added.

El shook her head. “Not dreaming,” she muttered.

“Not dreaming?” Will repeated slowly, the worried look back. “What do you mean?”

“I...” El trailed off uneasily. Could she tell Will about Kali? He didn't know much to begin with, and where would she start?

Will shifted, reflecting her discomfort. “You were saying stuff,” he mumbled. “Something about butterflies.”

El frowned. She hadn't been dreaming of butterflies. But then an image of one floated to the front of her mind. It was bright blue, and when it flew, its wings flashed different colours, like fairy lights. She tried to catch it but her fingers went right through it. “Oh,” was all she said. “Butterflies...”

“Do you want me to call Hopper?” Will asked. He still had his hand on her shoulder and he seemed reluctant to take it away, almost as if he thought it grounded her to real life. “Or my mom? She is always good when I have bad dreams.”

“Will,” El whispered, ignoring what he'd just said.

“Yeah?” Will said, a questioning tone in his voice as he lowered it to a whisper.

“Can you keep a secret?”

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El paced the living room; back and forth, back and forth and back again. She checked her watch - one that Mike had given her for Christmas two years ago. It was silver and loose like a bracelet with a clasp. He had got it for her so she could learn how to tell the clock time; the one that wasn't with numbers but hands that pointed to the

numbers. It had taken a while for El to understand it, but eventually she had gotten there. The time now showed the big hand pointed at the 9 and the small hand nearly pointed at the 3. That meant it was 2 - 4 - 5 in the other time. El sighed and looked out of the window. If Kali didn't show up soon, Hopper would be home and El knew that that wouldn't be a good thing. She wanted Kali to meet her family and friends more than anything, but she knew it would have to be done in the right way. She just wasn't sure what the right way was yet.

The sound of a car pulling up jerked her out of her daydream. Looking out of the window she saw with horror that Joyce was back from work early today and making her way up the path. El frantically searched for an excuse as to why she wasn't at school right now but her mind was still drawing blank as she heard the front door open and Joyce in the hallway, hanging up her coat.

She knew Joyce wouldn't be angry with her if she told her the truth. Maybe it would be for the best, and besides, she loved Joyce. Really loved her. It hadn't taken El long to realise that Joyce was the mother figure she needed in her life. Her real mom wasn't around, and couldn't take care of her. So Joyce did, and Eleven loved her for it.

"El! What are you doing back so early?" El looked up to see Joyce standing in the doorway, her eyes wide with shock and taking in her nervous movements around the room. She seemed to spot that something wasn't right and she came towards her. "Sweetheart what's the matter? Are you sick?" She was already touching her hand to El's forehead to feel for a fever. "You should've called me at work honey, I'd have come back sooner."

El shook her head. It had been easy to explain it to Will last night. Once she had started talking about Kali to him, the words had flowed out and the more she talked, the more she realised she missed her sister. In the brief time they'd been together, Kali had changed El's life forever.

Tears were forming in her eyes as she shook her head and she bit her lip nervously, trying to think of how to explain it to Joyce who was looking at her, concern clear on her face.

“Kali...” she whispered.

“Your sister?” Joyce asked, her eyes widening. “The one you told us about? In Chicago?”

El nodded. “She's come back.” She paused slightly then took a deep breath and said calmly, looking Joyce in the eyes. “To see me.”

Realisation dawned on Joyce's face and she stepped back. “She's coming here?” She asked. “Today?”

El nodded again, watching her nervously.

“Does Jim know?” Joyce asked carefully. “No he wouldn't or he would be here,” she sounded like she was talking to herself now. “When exactly did she say she would be coming?”

The words had barely left her mouth when Eleven felt it. Her presence in her mind, and she knew her sister was here. She looked at Joyce as her eyes refocused and nodded slowly. “She's here.”

Joyce jumped as El focused on the door and the lock flipped back, allowing the door to swing open. El walked calmly past a frozen Joyce and into the hallway from which she could see, standing on the doorstep and looking the same as she had last seen her, Kali.

“Jane,” Kali's voice was cracked with suppressed emotion, and suddenly, El was running down the hallway towards her and launching herself into her sister's waiting arms. They clung together on the doormat and El felt her cheeks grow wet as tears leaked out of her eyes. Pulling back, she looked at Kali properly for the first time and saw that her own cheeks were tracked with tear marks. “I've missed you, Jane.” She spoke in the same soft voice that El had heard in her dreams since the day she'd left.

El sniffed and smiled softly. “You're here now,” she said quietly. “We're together again.”

-:-

El could hear Joyce on the phone in the hall but she found she didn't mind that Hopper was being alerted.



Kali sat next to her on the sofa, watching her intently with those dark eyes. "So," she said. "You went back to your policeman?"

"Yes," El nodded. "I needed to come back. Without me my friends would've been killed." She gave a tiny smile. "I saved them."

"Jane," Kali reached across to take hold of her hand. "It was wrong of me to try and force you into something you obviously weren't ready for. I'm sorry."

El remembered back to that night, how she had robbed Kali of her own justice. "I'm sorry too," she said quietly. "And I'm sorry for leaving you like that."

Kali smiled and leaned back, "I understand," she said, glancing around the room at the photo frames that littered the surfaces. Hopper hated photographs of himself but having Jonathan in the family really didn't give him much of a choice, and

Joyce had insisted on putting them everywhere. She had said it was so El could have them to remember that she was loved, living in a proper family. Normal.

Kali turned back to her, "Your friends are very lucky to have you Jane."

El smiled again but this time it was wider. She watched as Kali got to her feet and walked around the room until she stopped by the window, picking up a picture frame and staring at it. El knew which one it was, it showed the party over the previous summer when Joyce and Hopper had taken them on a camping trip. Dustin lay in the grass sprawled out at everyone's feet; Lucas and Max crouched on one side of him pulling "gangster poses" and El stood in between Mike and Will. Will was smiling into the camera in a way that implied he was so used to having his photograph taken that it wasn't anything special anymore, and Mike had his arm wrapped around El's shoulders, grinning goofily as she rested her head on his shoulder. El loved that photo and even had the same one stuck in her locker at school.

As she watched, Kali's eyes grew shiny as she stared at that photo.

“Jane,” she whispered, looking back at El with a pained expression. “This... this cannot last. It is only a matter of time before the bad men come for you again.”

El frowned and shook her head. “The bad men are gone,” she said carefully. She knew there were still some of them left, but that was what Kali did; hunted them down and killed them.

Kali was shaking her head as she walked towards El. “No Jane, I’ve heard rumours. Of a secret government organisation in Mexico, they do the same things as those people did to us in that lab.” She stood in front of El now, staring down at her with those intense wide eyes. “There is more too; there are places like this all over the world.”

El thought about that. She had often heard Hopper speaking about other labs to Joyce, wondering whether they existed, but she had always tried not to think about it. It was too horrible. Now however, Kali was forcing her to deal with this issue, and it made El feel uncomfortable.

“If they hear about you, they will come for you.” Kali’s voice held an edge to it. One El knew came from years of torturing herself over years of abuse.

El straightened herself and lifted her chin, “then we’ll be ready for them.”

Kali shook her head and lifted the photograph so El could see it, see the happy faces of her friends. “Jane, you know that if you stay here your friends will be put in danger over and over again.” She looked at her sympathetically, like she understood.

El stood up, shaking her head. “No, I will look after them.”

“Your friends would lay down their lives to save you,” Kali reasoned. “You *know* that one day, that fact will kill them.”

El started to feel the prickling in the corners of her eyes that meant she was about to start crying but she blinked it away. Kali was strong, El had to be strong too.

“You left me to save your friends. Your policeman. *Him*.” Kali pointed

at Mike's face in the photo, looking at El in a way that made El know that she knew. "You can save them again." She put the frame onto the dresser next to her and took hold of El's shoulders. "Come with me, and we can finish this. Forever."

El shook her head slowly. She knew she couldn't leave Mike. She'd promised him. But to keep him safe, she knew she would do anything. "I can't leave," she whispered, trying to keep her voice steady. "I can't leave them again."

Kali sighed and shook her head, turning away. "I told you about my family once didn't I?" She asked suddenly. "About the home I found when I escaped the lab?"

El nodded silently, not knowing how to respond to the change in conversation.

"Well I was happy, like you are now. I thought I could live a normal life, Jane, like you think now." She shook her head. "These people take all of that away from you. They strip you of everything you've ever loved. But then you found me, and I know you felt it too. We're connected in a way that you could never be with these people!" She took hold of El's hand, squeezing it gently. "Jane, you know this is true, that was how I found you!"

El shook her head again, at a complete loss as to what to say. Finally she opened her mouth to speak but was cut off by the roar of an engine. It wasn't Hopper, she had heard his Cruiser come back some ten minutes ago even though he hadn't entered the house. She broke free of Kali's grasp on her hand and walked into the next room, trying not to let her emotions boil over. She could hear Kali following her, and she knew whose vehicle had just pulled up outside. Mike had obviously decided to ignore her warning not to follow her home and had brought the party to investigate. She knew she should've told him she went home sick.

"My friends are here," El mumbled, almost to herself but Kali heard her. El could see panic flit across her sister's face.

"You know what I'm saying is true, Jane. They will come between you and the bad men and they will get hurt. Or worse."

The lights were starting to flicker, and El instantly thought of the Demogorgon, but it wasn't any creature from the Upside Down. Eleven looked around to find herself no longer in the kitchen of her house. She was staring at men in lab suits with masks from behind a glass wall, and lying at their feet were the bodies of her friends. Dustin and Lucas lay on their sides, their bodies covered in blood, eyes open and staring sightlessly at her. Will lay near them, looking more unconscious than dead. And Mike... *Mike*. He was crawling on his knees near the body of Will, shaking him and trying to wake him up. Slowly, his eyes raised and he looked at Eleven, hatred burning his features until El no longer recognised him. "This is your fault!" He spat. "You did this! You're a monster." Then one of the men in suits drove a syringe into his neck and El watched as his eyes rolled back into his head and he collapsed next to Will.

"This isn't real!" El knew what her sister was capable of. She had felt it when she had made her see Papa. She didn't realise exactly what she was capable of until this moment. The images in her mind felt and looked so true, El wasn't sure anymore. She wasn't sure of anything. "This isn't real! This isn't real! *This isn't real!*"

There was the sound of smashing china and the world came back into focus. She stared across at Kali who looked just as shocked as she did, then down to the shattered vase on the floor.

"Jane -"

The sound of the front door smashing open stopped Kali's words, and seconds later, the door of the kitchen was also thrown open and Mike came skidding into the room. El stared at him like she'd never seen him before. Their eyes met, and there was none of the hatred in them that she had just seen. This was her Mike, not one that Kali had created. His eyes flickered down to the shards of his mother's vase and the water pooling over the kitchen tiles, then they drifted up to Kali and widened.

"Mike..." El said but her voice came out weird and croaky.

He met her eyes again, and El knew that he'd already forgiven her. It made her heart feel strange, like it was cracking, just like the broken flower vase.

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

Hope you liked it! Kali is an odd character to write and I hope I did her some justice. Leave your opinions below, let me know what you think:)

### 3. 003

#### Summary for the Chapter:

Her face had gone blank before he'd even finished his sentence and Mike stepped away from her, suddenly feeling the hairs on the back of his neck rise.

#### Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks for reading, and thank you for all the lovely comments on the last chapter! You guys really fuel me to write:)

#### Chapter 003

“What the hell is going on?”

Mike jumped as a door was slammed open and suddenly the room felt too crowded. He became aware that all his friends had followed him into the house after he'd made a break for it and they stood there, looks of bewilderment and confusion on all of their faces. Everyone except Will who had an expression of anxious relief.

Mike turned back to El who was no longer looking at him. She stared down as she shuffled her feet. Mike cleared his throat and all his friends turned their attentions to him instead. “This...” his voice cracked slightly as he tried to speak. He stared at Kali, watching everyone carefully like a caged animal tensed and ready to either attack or run. Mike knew instantly that he didn't trust her. The stories El had told him when she had returned had been - in his opinion - slightly romanticised. He couldn't blame El though; he couldn't imagine what she must have felt, finding someone who had powers like her, someone who had escaped from the lab, just like she had.

Mike had seen through it and had listened as El told him how Kali had made her see Brenner. That bastard. Mike had tried not to be too shocked or horrified at that because he had seen how El didn't hold it against her sister anymore, but Mike did. He had already formed an opinion of her before he'd even met her and these opinions had risen

to the surface quickly and suddenly once again before he could stop them.

He realised his friends were all still watching him, waiting for him to explain. Because he was always the person who explained things when it came to Eleven. It had always been him from the very beginning.

“She’s El’s sister.”

Everyone turned to look at Will who was standing at the back. He looked around at them all before glancing apologetically at Mike. The message was clear. *‘I’m sorry.’*

Noise from the other three broke out at once. None of them seemed to care that both El and Kali were still in the room watching them all.

“She’s *what?*” Dustin screeched.

“What’s she doing here?” Lucas waved his arms around, staring at Will like he had all the answers which, to be fair, he appeared to do so.

Max was staring unabashed at Kali who, Mike realised was no longer paying them any attention. She had moved over to El and was blocking her from their view and talking very quietly to her.

Well, she could’ve been talking at any volume, but Mike wouldn’t have been able to hear her either way over the clambering of his best friends.

“What is going on in here?”

Mike groaned internally as Hopper announced his arrival with his usual loud, slightly drawled question. Everyone stopped talking at once and turned to face the chief of police as he stared around the room, eyes coming to rest on his adopted daughter.

Kali stepped away from El and turned to look at Hopper filling the doorway. For once, Mike was glad of Hopper’s presence. He was always was when in a life threatening situation from alien monsters from a different dimension, but this was probably the first time he’d

been glad of the chief's proximity when it came to Eleven. Probably because usually he was interrupting.

"You must be Jane's father," Kali spoke with no fear in her voice. There was a confidence there that rivalled Hopper and that Mike didn't like one bit.

Hopper's eyes narrowed and he leaned on the doorframe. Mike saw that he was still in his uniform, that he hadn't even taken his hat off yet. Joyce hovered near him but slightly out of sight. Mike wished she'd enter the room. Joyce was formidable when it came to her kids, and he knew that she saw El as a daughter nowadays.

"I am," Hopper said calmly. "No need to ask who you are." He said it bluntly but with the hint of a question that was answered when El made eye contact with him and nodded slightly. Hopper sighed and took off his hat. "Well," he said, not looking at anyone. "I'm not sure it's a surprise if I'm honest, I always knew you might come looking for... Jane." He hesitated when saying her name, like it felt strange on his tongue.

Mike could understand that. When he had first found out that El had discovered her true name, the one her mother had given her, he had asked her if she wanted him to call her Jane from now on. She had smiled and shaken her head, and told him that he had given her the name El and that was the name she had that made her feel normal. *"El', short for Eleven."*

Without even meaning to, Mike had given her the freedom she had been looking for, and therefore that was the name she wanted to keep.

Mike saw El straighten her back and bite her lip. She looked upset and Mike fought the urge to go to her. "Dad..."

It was this word more than anything else that had been said which caused the strongest reaction. Kali blanched and flinched away slightly but as Mike turned his gaze towards her, her face seemed to harden back into the mask of toughness that seemed to be a permanent feature. Suddenly Mike felt an overwhelming and slightly troubling sense of understanding. He realised that as he watched Kali,



he was looking at Eleven. Or Eleven as she could've become, had she not had the nurturing and love that her family and friends had given her. Of course, they were two completely different people, but Mike understood in that moment, why El felt so attached to Kali. It didn't mean he liked it, but he understood. Eleven had escaped, and by chance stumbled into him. Mike had shown her what it felt like to be accepted. He had cared for her from the very beginning and never thought of her as any different. She had been able to heal her wounds the lab had left her with, able to let go of the anger before it consumed her.

Mike didn't know much about Kali's past, only what El had told him, but he could see that she hadn't been given the chance to let go of her anger. She had never been given the chance to let anyone love her.

"I think I need to speak to Jane alone," Hopper said, his gaze leaving Kali and moving around the room until it rested on Mike.

They stared at each other before Mike sighed and looked away, not being able to hold up against the Hopper stare when he knew deep down it was the best thing.

El nodded but before moving, she took hold of Kali's elbow and looked at her. "Don't leave," she said quietly, but loud enough for Mike, and probably everyone else, to hear.

"I won't," Kali said firmly.

El nodded, apparently satisfied and started walking towards Hopper. To leave the room however, she had to walk past Mike and he wasn't going to let her go without some sort of confirmation. "El," he said, reaching out to catch her arm. She looked at him with wide eyes and Mike forgot that there were other people listening to them. "You promised," he reminded her quietly, and he hated the way his voice shook as he said it. He was referring to the promise she had made years ago before leaving to close the gate. The promise that he wouldn't lose her again.

He knew just by looking at her face that she understood what he meant and she nodded. "I know," she replied quietly and to his

growing sense of unease her eyes were shining with tears as she turned away from him and walked out of the room.

Hopper spared them one more glance before he turned and followed her, leaving the room deathly quiet as everyone stood still.

Dustin broke the silence, turning to look at Kali standing in the corner and watching them warily. "So, if you're El's sister does that mean you have superpowers too?"

-:-

"Dustin what are you doing?"

Mike glanced up from where he had been staring at the knots in the wooden table to see Dustin retreat from the door which he had been previously pressing his ear to.

Max was standing behind him with her arms crossed over her chest and looking murderous. "You can't listen at the door!"

"Says who?" Dustin shot back right at her and Mike groaned, letting his head fall down onto the table top. He couldn't deal with their bickering right now. Not when he was in an internal emotional war with himself.

"Says decency!" Max snapped back. "Eavesdropping is rude and if the Chief finds out, no one will protect you!"

"Oh and you're the perfect example of a decent human being aren't you!" Dustin argued as Will sighed heavily from next to Mike, glancing at him with a concerned expression.

"Okay okay," Lucas finally decided to step in between the two arguing members of the party before Max started throwing punches at Dustin's face. "We all need to calm down!"

Mike saw him shoot him a glance from the corner of his eye and sighed, lifting his head up.

"Lucas, we all know what this is about," Max gestured frantically to the other room where Hopper and El were still talking. No one had

heard a peep from them for the past half an hour and the tensions in the room had only gotten worse when Kali had risen and walked out, heading up the stairs without a word. "El's sister has obviously come here to convince El to go with her."

Lucas looked from the door, to Max, to Mike then back to the door again. "But... but El wouldn't leave, would she?"

Mike hung his head. To tell the truth he had no idea. Maybe it was the part of him that always doubted himself. The part that told himself in the early hours of the morning that whatever him and El had couldn't last. He wasn't good enough for her, and never could be. He knew she missed her sister, but up until now his faith that she was happy enough with her life that she wouldn't go looking for her had kept him from worrying. Until now.

Dustin shrugged, glancing quickly at Mike before saying quietly. "I don't know... I mean, she came back to save us from the Mind Flayer right? Well, maybe now that Collie, or whatever her name is, has given her a chance to go with her, maybe she'll take it."

Lucas was shaking his head. "No." He said firmly. "No, I refuse to believe it. El wouldn't leave." He gestured to vaguely to Mike sitting at the table. "She wouldn't leave Mike for starters. The only time she ever has was because she was transported to a different dimension and then forced not to contact him!"

"She wasn't exactly forced though, was she?" Max said quietly. Mike closed his eyes and tried to ignore the old wound opening up at the mention of that time. "Hopper could only do so much to keep her inside. She *chose* to stay away -"

"Because Mike was being watched by the bad men!" Lucas interrupted. "We all were!"

"Yeah but still," Dustin muttered. "A whole year..." he trailed off, looking at Mike with a guilty expression.

"But El doesn't have to hide anymore," Will said calmly from his spot next to Mike. "She has a family; friends; a normal life."

She can decide what she wants and I don't think she's ever going to leave Mike again."

"I thought that too," Mike spoke up and his voice sounded croaky and hoarse. He raised his head to look at them all and they stared back at him with worried expressions. "But maybe we're not enough."

"What are you talki -"

"Kali can understand El in ways that we never could," Mike cut Lucas's argument off abruptly. "Maybe El needs her more than she needs me."

"You're right."

Mike knew from his friends expressions that she had reentered the room. Max looked furious, Lucas pale and Dustin caught in a mix of surprised awe and frustration.

He raised himself from his chair and turned to face Kali where she stood, leaning on the doorframe. She radiated confidence and power but she was looking at them all with a strange expression on her face. Mike couldn't tell what it was, he couldn't read her face at all. She was a closed book to everyone - except maybe El.

"It doesn't mean she'll chose to go with you," Mike spoke suddenly, feeling a calmness descend upon him that wasn't there before. "El doesn't need you any more than she needs us. She can make her own choices."

*And that's what makes her normal.*

Mike knew that if in the end El chose to go with Kali and leave him behind, he wouldn't try and stop her. Every decision she had made by herself in the past four years had been proof that she was no longer a lab rat of the government. Mike would never, *ever* take that away from her. It would hurt him, of course it would. He wasn't even sure if he could survive without El at this point, but nothing, not even the pain of loosing her would cause him to force her to stay against her wishes.

"Why do you call her that?" Kali had her head cocked to one side,

arms folded across her chest. She didn't seem perturbed by Mike's statement, just curious. "Her name is Jane."

"Her official name, you mean," Max spoke before Mike could and Kali's eyes darted to the red head, narrowing slightly. "No one who knows her *properly* calls her Jane."

It was an obvious dig and Mike knew it. Max was standing across from Kali, mimicking her actions through crossed arms and narrowed eyes.

"It was the name her mother gave to her," Kali spoke softly and yet there was a dangerous undercurrent to it. "You say she is free to make her own choices and yet none of you calls her by her true name?"

Max looked like she wanted to swing her fist at Kali's face but Lucas shot out a hand and grabbed her arm, stopping her. Kali was too powerful to take on, even for Max.

"El is the name we gave her before we knew it was Jane," Will spoke up before Mike could, probably a good thing because Mike was currently bordering on too angry to form words. "It's short for Eleven because that was her name then." He paused and glanced sideways at Mike. "El kind of stuck after that."

Mike glared at Kali. He found he was no longer afraid of her. Or sympathetic. The only emotion he had for her was anger. He was angry that she had come back into El's life after all this time, when El was finally happy and felt normal. She'd dragged up the past and all the things that came with it. These things hurt El and that made Mike mad.

He was beyond mad. He was furious.

"She had the choice to stay with you before," he said, and was surprised to hear his voice held nothing of the inner turmoil rolling around his head. It was quite calm, but Kali turned her gaze back to him and she must have seen something in his eyes because she tensed, ready for the fight. "She chose to come back to us." He took a step forward. "Face it," he said gesturing around the room. "This is

her home. You never really knew her, and you never will.”

He expected her to react in some way, to even be angry at his words, but she didn't. Her face had gone blank before he'd even finished his sentence and Mike stepped away from her, suddenly feeling the hairs on the back of his neck rise.

“She's my sister.” Eleven appeared in the doorway behind Kali. “I have to go with her.”

Mike shook his head. Something clawed at the back of his mind, trying to get to the surface. Something was wrong but his brain was full of fog and El's words rung in his ears. All thoughts of that were forgotten when he noticed that El had a packed bag lying on the ground next to her feet. He shook his head harder. “No...”

“I'm sorry,” El said, looking at him with sorrowful eyes. “I'm sorry about breaking my promise.”

Mike felt a huge lump fill his throat and tears sting his eyes. She couldn't leave him, not again.

But she was. There was no denying that this was happening.

Hopper was nowhere in sight and Mike could only guess that he'd already said his farewells and couldn't bare to see her go.

She turned in the doorway and picked up her travel bag, looking back one last time, tears in her eyes. “Goodbye Mike,” she said.

The world went black at those words, and Mike hit the floor with one last murmured ‘No’, as his friends lunged for him. Max managed to catch his head before it hit the ground but their cries of confusion fell on deaf ears as Mike just lay there, no longer able to cope with losing El all over again.

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

Thanks for reading, leave opinions and kudos ;) I love writing from Mike's point of view but next

chapter I'm gonna switch it up a little :)

## 4. 004

### Summary for the Chapter:

Lucas had started shaking his head slightly as if to tell them to keep their mouths shut but Dustin had already turned to Steve who was frowning at them all, and blurted “El’s sister turned up and is trying to make El turn to the Dark Side.”

### Notes for the Chapter:

I am so sorry for the delay in updating. I know I said I would update before Christmas came around but it’s been very tough on my whole family as my grandpa passed away two days before. It’s been very hard because we have always spent Christmas with him and the funeral was last week. Basically I’ve been a bit preoccupied with stuff going on to focus on this but it’s here now so I hope you enjoy it.

This chapter is for my grandpa, I’ll love you forever.

### Chapter 004

“Mike?”

“Mike!”

“MIKE!!”

Max sighed and tried to stop herself from rolling her eyes at the unconscious Mike Wheeler in front of them. Stupid idiot had to go and faint didn't he?

“This'll wake him up,” she said, stepping forward and ignoring El’s warning of ‘don't hurt him’ to say loudly “Oi, Wheeler!” and slap him around the face. Not hard, but with enough force to send his head the other way and El to make a squeak of protest next to her.



Why he had collapsed in the first place totally baffled her. One minute he had looked like he'd been getting the upper hand over Kali and the next he had gone all pale and glassy-eyed, muttered no a couple of times then keeled over.

Mike groaned and his eyes fluttered open to the obvious relief of El who knelt down next to him and said "Mike? Are you okay?"

Mike blinked blearily before his gaze focused on her. Max saw him stare at El with a look of confusion and bewilderment and she groaned quietly. Please, please don't let Wheeler have lost his memory. They couldn't be dealing with that shit right now.

"You stayed," Mike spoke, causing Max to focus on him again and she felt her face scrunch up in confusion. She didn't have a clue what he was on about.

Apparently neither did Eleven. "What?" She whispered.

"Mike, mate, what are you talking about?" Dustin sounded like he was trying to be humorous but Lucas shushed him quickly.

Usually Max would've felt the need to usher the other boys out of the room and escape with them. Moments between Mike and Eleven like this - when they were staring at each other like they were having a conversation without words - usually made Max feel uncomfortable, like she was intruding on something. However, in this situation things were different. They needed to know what the hell was going on and that required the couple on the sofa to speak with actual words.

Luckily Mike seemed to feel the need to explain himself out loud, and even though he spoke only to El, Max didn't even pretend to ignore them like she usually did, and she knew that the other boys were listening just as intently as she was.

"You left," Mike said quietly, and Max couldn't help but notice that his eyes were shining slightly. There was a ghost of the Mike she had first met on his face. The Mike that didn't have Eleven.

They were staring at each other but El looked just as confused as Max

felt as she shook her head. "No, I didn't."

"Yes, you did!" Mike was sitting up now, shaking his head like there was something stuck in his brain that he was desperately trying to get out. "You said you had to leave, that you were sorry." He paused. Swallowed. "And then you said 'goodbye'."

If Max hadn't been waiting for something, anything, she would've missed the reactions of Dustin and Lucas to Mike's words.

She turned away from Mike and El to look at her two other friends. Lucas had let out a breath of air it sounded like he had been holding for hours and he was shaking his head ever so slightly. Dustin was gazing at El but he looked like he was seeing something a long way away. Or a long time ago.

It clicked in Max's head. She had never wondered until this moment why she had never heard Mike or El ever say the word goodbye to one another, but it occurred to her now that maybe it was because that word was just too painful for the both of them.

"What you saw wasn't real," El was talking quietly and Max refocused on her words. She had her hand on Mike's face, forcing him to look at her. He stared at her like he was a downing and she was his lifeline. "Do you remember what I told you about Kali's powers?" There was an edge to El's voice that Max had never heard before. It sent a shiver down her spine when she realised that it was veiled anger. El was trying her damn hardest to keep calm, and it was only just working. "I told you," she whispered and this time max knew she wasn't supposed to hear it. "You won't loose me again. I'm not leaving you."

"She made you see El leaving?" Will asked, a frown etched on his face.

Max let out a growl of frustration as Mike nodded and El looked at him like he could make her heart break. "I'm calling Steve," she snapped, turning on her heel towards the door. "I'm gonna take that bat of his and ram it up her -"

"I don't think that's a good idea," Lucas interrupted her, grabbing hold of her by the shoulders and spinning her back around to face

them.

“And besides,” Dustin added. “Steve swore he'd never let you lay a finger on that bat again after you almost took Billy's balls off.”

“Dude, the guy owes me,” Max snapped at Dustin. “If it wasn't for me Steve would still be nursing that pretty face of his!”

Dustin opened his mouth but this time it was Will who did the interrupting. “Can we focus on the problem at hand here,” he snapped. “Before we go back to issues as menial as Steve's face, that should've been solved two and a half years ago!”

“Right, yeah.” Dustin turned back to the group. “Sorry,” he added in Mike and El's direction. The pair ignored him.

Max coughed and shrugged, “yeah but I still think punk-o in the other room deserves a punch in the face.”

“I don't think physical violence can hurt Kali,” Will said. “She'll use her powers on you.”

Max cocked an eyebrow at the smaller boy. Will had grown, but Max had gotten taller too in the past couple of years and she still beat him in height. “Yeah well, we'll see about that.”

“Don't, Max.” El had risen from the couch and was staring at her. “Will is right, Kali is very powerful but she won't hurt you if you leave her alone.”

Lucas coughed and looked pointedly at Mike, still sitting on the sofa and still looking pale from passing out. El followed his gaze and Max looked at her as her face softened when her gaze landed on her nerd boyfriend sitting on the sofa, whose obvious worst fear was that she'd leave. He was a weakness and Max knew it, El knew it, everyone in this room knew it. And Kali definitely knew it.

“She picked on Mike because he is an easy target when it comes to you,” Max muttered and El's brown eyes flicked up to her face, her own hardening against the truth that she must know Max was telling her. “Let's be honest El, we all know that he comes before anyone else in this room for you.”

No one denied it, because it was true and they all knew it.

"I don't think Kali understood that until now," Max continued. "It probably scared the shit outta her."

"No," El said quietly, looking down at the carpet. "She's still my sister."

Max bit down on her tongue to stop herself saying what she wanted to out loud. That Kali wasn't her sister, that the only things they had in common was that fucking Lab and that time was no longer a part of El's life and it never needed to be again. Max knew it would consume her friend if she let it. El would become haunted with revenge, she would make terrible choices and she would be lost to them forever. Like Kali was now. Max wanted to tell El that to let go of her past life, she needed to let go of Kali, once and for all. But Max bit her lip and said none of these things, because she knew that if she told El now, her friend would move further away from her and further towards Kali.

And Max would be damned to an eternity in hell if she ever let that happen.

-:-

"I still don't get why El doesn't just tell her to piss off," Dustin muttered as he fiddled with the radio in Steve's car. Dustin always got shotgun when it came to Steve's car, a fact that annoyed Max to no end.

Her, Lucas and Dustin were currently sat, waiting for Steve to come back from where he had raced to get them all take-out like they always did every Saturday afternoon. Unlike every beginning to the weekend however, three members of the party were missing. El had radioed to tell them that she was staying home, although according to Mike it wasn't anything to worry about. Kali was only staying for a few days. Mike himself had met them in the park for an hour before heading home - or at least that was what he had told the others. Max suspected that he had really gone to check El was okay before he had really gone home, if that was even where he was. Will had gone with Mike, which only increased Max's suspicions about the whereabouts

of their party leader.

The other three had decided to just continue with their normal tradition and try to pretend everything was fine. It wasn't fine though, and they all felt it. It was like a tension in the air that was so tangible you could practically see it. Max didn't know whether talking about it would make things better but Dustin had been unusually quiet up until this point.

"Didn't you listen to Mike last night?" Lucas shot at him from his seat next to Max. "As much as we don't like it, she's El's sister and that's obviously important to her."

"Will said there was a huge shouting match after we'd left last night," Dustin said, perking up a little at the thought. "He told me he thought the house was gonna come down."

Max shook her head as the front door opened and Steve sat down heavily in the drivers seat. "What are you shitheads gossiping about?" He asked in typical Steve fashion as he handed them all their food.

"Nothing!" Max, Dustin and Lucas all said at once.

Max bit the inside of her cheek and looked at Dustin. She knew he was probably the most likely to tell Steve everything, and to be perfectly honest, Max thought it wouldn't exactly be a bad idea if Steve was confided in. He had a very obvious soft spot for El and she adored him in return. He never called her a shithead or loser - although that was possibly because her dad was the police chief - and he was basically would give her anything she wanted if she asked for it.

Lucas had started shaking his head slightly as if to tell them to keep their mouths shut but Dustin had already turned to Steve who was frowning at them all, and blurted "El's sister turned up and is trying to make El turn to the Dark Side."

Max couldn't help but roll her eyes at the Star Wars reference but she could see Dustin's point. Not that she would ever admit to it.

“Wh - wait, *what?*” Steve was twisting in his seat to stare at them all and Max could already see the worry in his eyes, disguised as disbelief but still there.

Max exchanged a look with Lucas that plainly told him that she was going to tell Steve and not to stop her from doing just that. Lucas shrugged and looked away and out of the window. Max turned back to Dustin who was looking at them both and nodded.

Steve sat and listened as they told him everything that had happened in the last fifteen hours.

When they had finished, Steve sat back in his seat, facing the windscreen so Max couldn't see his face. She heard him blow out a loud breath and she looked at Dustin to try and gauge his reactions.

“So Kali told El that there are other Labs like the one we had?” Steve asked finally. Max heard in his voice that he was trying not to freak out by being eerily calm about the whole thing. “Ones that also do experiments on kids like El?”

Dustin nodded, “yeah that's what she said...” he shrugged. “For all we know though it could be a load of bullshit.”

“Why would it be bullshit, Dustin?” Lucas spoke up, sounding irritated. “Why would she make something like that up?”

“*I don't know maybe she wants to get El to trust her!*” Dustin's voice came out strained and slightly frustrated.

Steve had been watching the interaction with a strange expression on his face. Max had only seen that look three times: When Billy had arrived at the Byers house searching for her; when he had picked them up from high school in the early days when they had only just started and he had heard that Dustin had been picked on by some juniors; and last year when she had been kicked off the girls soccer team for getting into a fight with Betty Andrews, which in her defence the other girl had started. All three times had ended up with Steve fighting with someone - whether physically with Billy, threateningly with those assholes of juniors that Max can't even remember the names of now, or verbally, with her old coach as he

had argued that she shouldn't be kicked from the team. Basically, that look meant that Steve was gearing for a fight.

"Let's go," Steve turned around to face the wheel as Max sat back in her seat, nerves mixing with anticipation in her stomach and making it feel weird. Steve had already started the engine and was reversing out of the car parking space - much slower than Max liked - before anyone asked where they were going.

"We're going to the Police station," Steve said as he spun the steering wheel around and stomped down on the gas after Dustin had raised the question they all wanted an answer to. "We're going to talk to Hopper and find out what's going on."

Max thought she heard him mutter quietly, "I'm sick of being left in the dark."

She fell back in her seat, and exchanged a look with Lucas. For the first time in a good ten hours she felt like she was doing something helpful. Anything to keep El from going down the path to the dark side.

-:-

They pulled up outside the police station within twenty minutes. Max might think Steve's driving was slow but she had to admit, being a passenger when he was driving didn't at all feel dangerous. It didn't feel exhilarating either, which is how she felt when zooming along the roads.

"Right you lot," Steve turned in his seat so he could fix Max with a stare she knew all too well. "Let me do the talking, keep chilled or Hopper will loose his shit, you got me?"

Dustin saluted, Lucas nodded and Max sighed and shrugged in defeat. She needed answers more than she needed to have a go at Hopper for letting all this shit happen in the first place. The deeper part of her mind thought it was likely he didn't feel too good about it either, but her first reaction was annoyance at the fact that the police chief was still letting Kali stay in his house.

“Right,” Steve huffed and opened the car door as everyone spilled out after him. “Let’s do this.”

Flo looked up as they all traipsed in through the door. She let out a weary sigh. “Hop is busy, Mr Harrington.”

“He’s not busy enough,” Steve learnt against the desk so he could flash his best smile at the police receptionist. “We just need ten minutes of his time.”

Flo turned her gaze on the three kids. “You’re bringing children to the police station?” She shook her head and sighed, “you know what, i don’t want to know. Can’t be any crazier than the things I’ve seen happen around this town!”

“*Teenagers*,” Dustin muttered under his breath.

“Shut *up*!” Lucas hissed back.

Flo shook her head and picked up the phone sitting on her desk, throwing a doubtful look at Steve who just grinned at her.

Max smirked as he threw her a subtle wink.

“Some kids here to see you,” Flo spoke into the phone, still eying them all up and down. Max stared back unflinching and she thought she saw the older woman look at her with slight affirmation. Of what exactly, Max didn’t know or particularly care.

“With Steve Harrington, they say they need to talk to you urgently.” A few seconds passed before the receptionist placed the phone back in the holder and looked up at them. “He’ll see you now. I trust you know where his office is...”

Max had barely heard the end of her sentence before Dustin and Lucas had taken off down the corridor, Max close behind them. Steve lingered for a moment longer to thank Flo for her cooperation so he hadn’t yet caught up with them by the time Dustin had thrown open Hopper’s door in a way that was probably extremely disrespectful to do so to the chief of police, and barged in ignoring Hopper’s angry growl at the sudden noise, just like he always did.



“What the hell kid, you never heard of knocking?”

Max saw Steve hurriedly shut the door behind him as he followed the teenagers into the room. Max, Lucas and Dustin all stood in front of Hopper’s desk, glaring down at him where he sat, looking completely unfazed by their dark looks in his direction.

“We don’t have time to knock,” Max snapped. Under normal circumstances she doubted she would address the chief in such a way but worry for El was making her braver, and angrier, than she had felt in a long while.

Hopper leant back in his seat and looked at them all, but he didn’t look angry, just resigned. “Okay why don’t you lot take a seat.”

Steve pulled up a chair but Max, Lucas and Dustin stood in place, all three of them with arms across their chests, waiting.

Hopper waved a hand, shaking his head at their stubbornness. “Or you could stand it’s up to you.”

“What’s going on with El?” Lucas broke the sullen silence. “We need answers and none of us knows what’s going on!”

Max saw Hopper’s face fall and become a little softer, which just made her more worried. “I know,” he said gently, leaning forwards towards them. “But right now all you need to know is that El isn’t going anywhere. You have to trust me on that, okay?”

Max looked over at her friends and met Lucas’s gaze. She knew they were both thinking the same thing, and apparently so was Dustin.

“So did you know about the other labs before now?”

Hopper looked from one face to the other and sighed. “Yeah,” he said in a huff. “Yeah I did, but I was never one hundred percent certain.”

“Wait up,” Steve spoke up suddenly from behind them and Max jumped slightly. She had forgotten he had been sitting there this whole time. He was frowning and looking from Hopper to the others. “You knew about those labs and you never said anything?”

Everyone turned to Hopper who ran his hand over his face. Max looked at him and thought suddenly of how tired he looked. There were bags under his eyes that were slightly bloodshot from lack of sleep. His whole demeanour just sagged. "I thought that if I told anyone it would become our problem. I thought everyone deserved a few years rest after what we've all been through."

Max couldn't argue with that, but she knew that he should've at least warned them before now. It had come back to bite Hopper in the arse and she felt for him. Putting aside her anger and frustration she knew he had all of their best interests at heart. She knew that because he had always looked out for them no matter what. That's what a real father should be, and Jim Hopper was more of a father figure to her than her step-dad was, and more there for her than her real dad was. So Max knew he cared, and he had cared enough to want them all to have a little peace in the years since 1984.

"It's okay," she heard herself saying before the words had been given permission. Hop looked up at her and there was a vulnerability in his face that she had never, ever seen there before. She supposed El made them all feel like that. El had made any ice around their hearts melt almost as soon as she had entered their lives. That was why she was so special to Max, why she was special to them all.

She gave Hopper a small smile and reached across the desk to place her rather small hand in comparison, on his broad shoulder and gave it a tiny squeeze. "I trust you."

"So do I," Lucas said instantly. "But we have to work together to make sure El..." he trailed off, apparently unable to say it.

"Doesn't get led to the dark side?" Dustin offered helpfully.

Lucas shook his head and looked like he was trying to stifle an eye roll whilst blinking back moisture in his eyes.

"I think we need to head home," Hopper stood finally. "It might not be fighting inter-dimensional monsters, but it's going to be tricky."

Max sighed and turned towards the door as Steve got up from his chair. "We just have to convince El that her sister is a crazy psycho

who will end up destroying everything around her, and El doesn't owe her anything," Max said, trying to make it sound cheerful.

Hopper paused, one hand on the door handle, the other holding his hat that he had just placed on his head. He shook his head and Max heard him say quietly. "I preferred the monsters."

**Author's Note:**

Feedback is really appreciated :) thanks for reading!